

Stewardship 2 – Receiving Gods Gifts

Psalm 103:1-5

- ¹ Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and all that is within me,
bless his holy name.
- ² Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and do not forget all his benefits—
- ³ who forgives all your iniquity,
who heals all your diseases,
- ⁴ who redeems your life from the Pit,
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
- ⁵ who satisfies you with good as long as you live
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

John 1:1-5, 10-13

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

¹⁰He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹²But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

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Today is the second in a three-part series entitled “Standing Mid-stream in God’s Grace”. We began last week by noting how it is God’s nature to give - not just initially in creation, but throughout peoples’ lives and throughout history. God’s grace hits the high-water mark in the gift of forgiveness through Jesus and the empowerment for new life by the Holy Spirit.

Our goal related to God’s gift-giving is more than some general awareness that God is a loving giver and that God’s gifts are “out there” somewhere.

That’s a “coupon mentality” – we know that there are coupons out there and that we could benefit from using them, but few of us ever do.

Rather, we want to walk down to that stream of God’s grace, and roll up our pant legs, and walk right into the water. Not even content to stand at the edge where we can feel it, but miss the flow. No! We want to go into the middle of the stream, where the water is the most fresh and the current is strong. That’s where we will feel its refreshment and power.

The psalmist lists only a few of God's "benefits" (gifts) that flow from God: love and mercy, forgiveness, healing, a second chance.

How do we receive such gifts from God?

In John's gospel, he spoke of "receiving Jesus". "...to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God..."¹

First, we receive God's gifts by receiving them.

Can it be possible that God gives such blessings? In much of our life, we have to earn for what we have.

I think of a man from my hometown named Ralph. Ralph had grown up on a country town, graduated high school, and gone to work at a local manufacturing plant. He was promoted throughout his tenure, held a responsible position. He and his wife owned a nice home.

From a human point of view we would say that "Ralph made something of himself". At a deeper level, however, we would have to say that Ralph used what he was given. God had given him a good mind, a strong work ethic, and common sense. Ralph used God's gifts well.

Receiving God's gifts puts us in the posture of faith. That stance is not with arms raised and fists clinched in some victory we have won. Nor is it the stance of legs firmly on the ground and fists placed proudly on our hips. Receiving God's gifts puts us into the *posture of receptivity*. Faith in this sense is two empty hands, open for God to fill.

The Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner spoke of the human person as the mystery of infinite emptiness and God as the mystery of infinite fullness.²

To receive God's gifts we must first see ourselves as we are (as "receivers") and open our hands to God the Giver.

If we're busy trying to

- work for the gifts,
- massage the divine for a favor, or simply are
- distracted by the activities of our lives, then we'll miss the gift.

If we know that that we are, by our creation, receivers, then we will be ready to step into the center of the stream and open wide our hands and arms to receive the flow.

What is it that you most need today? Patience, perseverance, hope, courage, wisdom, guidance? Rather than try to drum up those things within you, remember the psalmist who said "do not forget all of God's benefits".

The Little League World Series final game will be played in Williamsport, Pennsylvania today. I remember an early lesson taught when I was a little leaguer. It was as simple as it was elemental to the game: if you want to catch the ball, you've got to open your baseball glove.

Take the posture of receptivity. Open your hands, your heart and your mind that you may receive from God what you most need.

¹ John 1:12

² Thelma Hall, Thelma Hall, Too Deep for Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina, Paulist Press, New York, 1988, p. 35

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We learn from other gifts we receive that there is something more that is essential to receiving God's gifts.

The psalmist recalls God's blessings and responds with blessing or praising God.³

We not only receive the gifts of God in faith, but also with gratitude.

Parents with young children are diligent when their child receives a gift. They prompt the child asking, "now, what do you say?"

In the exchange of an object, it is the response of gratitude that acknowledges both the object as a gift, and the giver as the giver.

And so the children learn to respond, "thank you".

Gratitude happens in receiving gifts when we realize that we are receivers and that God gives out of love.

When two people are in love, and one gives a gift, the other smiles, tilts their head slightly, and says with extended breath "thank you". The gift is not only an object given, but an expression of love. This is the nature of God's gifts to us.

Forgiveness is not merely a change of being before God and a burden lifted from our heart. Forgiveness is an expression of God's love for us. And knowing that, we are grateful.

Sometimes, however, receiving a gift brings the feeling of humiliation. The cause seems to be the awareness that the giver has more and that the receiver has less and has need.

Giving gifts can create a relationship of dependency or inferiority. But in relation to God, God has everything, and gives first the breath of life and the gifts to sustain the life.

Rather than God's gifts communicating "I [God] am big and you are insignificant", in giving life and life sustaining gifts, God is saying, "You are loved".

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As someone wrote, people are the "fruits of God's creativity and the object of God's blessing".⁴

Knowing that God is the generous giver, we can acknowledge our need and ask for God's gifts. With open hands and a grateful heart, we receive what God generously gives us, knowing that they are an expression of God's love.

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³ Psalm 103:1

⁴ Miroslav Volf, Free of Charge, Zondervan Press, Grand Rapids, MI, 2005, p.. 247